

less safe, it has ruined our Nation's credibility in the eyes of the world, and it has made us worse off economically and militarily as well.

On Tuesday we will hear from experts, including Lieutenant General William Odom and former CIA employee and Georgetown professor Dr. Paul Pillar. Additional testimony will come from experts from Save the Children, the National Priorities Project, and a representative from the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America.

This war, Mr. Speaker, has many unseen costs: the costs to our military and diplomatic standing in the region; the cost to the Iraqi civilians, especially the most innocent victims, the children; the cost to America's working families who see funds being diverted away from important domestic programs to fund the ongoing occupation; and the cost to our brave men and women in service to our country. Almost 2,700 troops have given their lives for this misguided cause.

And the costs to our veterans, which may be the most heartbreaking of all: the underfunding of veterans clinics, the lack of support for those dealing with posttraumatic stress, the families left behind with little benefits or support from the Department of Defense. Veterans have sacrificed for our country. They deserve to receive our Nation's support. We have a responsibility, Mr. Speaker, a responsibility to take care of those who sacrifice and defend us during times of war.

Mr. Speaker, I voted against this war. Some of my colleagues voted for it. We disagreed then, but I think we can all agree now our troops need our support, and the best way to support the troops is to bring them home.

Earlier this year I introduced H.R. 5875, a bill to repeal the President's Iraq war powers, because Congress needs to stand up. Congress needs to take back its constitutional responsibilities. And Congress needs to insist that the President, the Commander in Chief, stop this misguided occupation of Iraq.

I urge my colleagues to join me at the forum on Tuesday from 2 to 4 p.m., and I urge you to cosponsor the Iraq War Powers Repeal Act. I also urge you to stand up for our troops by standing up for peace.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. OSBORNE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. OSBORNE addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

#### COMMEMORATING THE 1-YEAR ANNIVERSARY OF HURRICANE RITA

Mr. BOUSTANY. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to speak out of turn.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Without objection, the gentleman from Louisiana is recognized for 5 minutes.

There was no objection.

Mr. BOUSTANY. Mr. Speaker, this week southwest Louisiana will pause to commemorate the 1-year anniversary of Hurricane Rita, the third most expensive natural disaster in U.S. history.

Rita was as equally devastating as Hurricane Katrina, causing widespread destruction to our communities and our Nation's critical energy infrastructure. Since then there has been a palpable view among many of my constituents that their story has been forgotten and their needs unknown.

Throughout the past year, I have worked hard to ensure that Rita does not become "the forgotten storm" among Members of this body, and to date Congress has approved unprecedented Federal funding for our recovery. And for this the people of southwest Louisiana are grateful.

But not until you visit the coastal parishes of southwest Louisiana, Vermilion Parish, Calcasieu Parish, and Cameron Parish, can you understand the scope and magnitude of the destruction of Rita and the long road we have to protect our coast and our energy infrastructure from future disaster.

In the year since Rita, I have brought 19 House Members, including Speaker HASTERT, to southwest Louisiana to see these towns and communities and to meet the great residents of my district who were able to ensure a safe and thorough evacuation that did not result in the loss of life as we saw in New Orleans.

All of my colleagues who have joined me in visiting the communities hit hardest by Rita have come away with an increased awareness of the importance of southwest Louisiana to the energy infrastructure of the United States, as well as the need to protect our coastal wetlands and provide a continuous stream of funding to protect our communities.

The eye of Hurricane Rita made landfall in Cameron Parish, Louisiana, bringing with it a storm surge over 15 feet. In the coastal parishes of Vermilion, Cameron, and Calcasieu, the destruction was undescrivable, but no lives were lost. Local officials in southwest Louisiana were commended for managing an orderly evacuation of residents and offering a detailed plan for recovery and rebuilding. In short, the people of southwest Louisiana did, and are doing, everything right.

Amidst the ruin, the one constant was the spirit and determination of the people of southwest Louisiana. The common question from local residents was not, "Where do we go from here?" but rather, "When can we rebuild our homes, our businesses, and our way of life?"

More than any other storm, Rita exposed the critical state of our coastal wetlands and the role they play in supporting the energy infrastructure of the United States. These wetlands serve as a critical buffer against ocean

storms as well as protect industries and cities further inland. Before Rita, the projected land loss in Louisiana was approximately 24 square miles per year, the equivalent of two football fields an hour. After Rita, our coast is even more vulnerable, and some worry a modest category one hurricane could deal an even more destructive blow to our coastal parishes and the energy infrastructure that they support.

During Rita, oil platforms and drilling rigs in the storm's path were forced to shut down and evacuate their workers. This led to the halting of 98 percent of oil and natural gas production in the Gulf of Mexico.

And when the Nation's 12th largest port in Lake Charles was forced to shut down, energy production and distribution were brought to a virtual standstill.

Protecting and strengthening our coasts is not only a Louisiana problem, it is an American problem. And it is one that affects American families and businesses that rely on energy we produce in Louisiana and transport throughout this country.

Thousands of oil and gas facilities are concentrated throughout the gulf coast and in southwest Louisiana, meaning that any future storm could have a crippling effect on our Nation's domestic energy production. Over one-third of the U.S. Strategic Petroleum Reserve is stockpiled in Cameron Parish in my district, and soon over 25 percent of our Nation's natural gas supply will run through that parish as well.

Mr. Speaker, often in the past year I am stopped by my colleagues here in the body who ask, how can I help? My answer to them now is very clear. Help us to protect ourselves. This year the House and Senate have already responded to this request by approving legislation that would give Louisiana its fair share of oil and gas revenues produced off our shores. This solution will provide our State with the necessary funding to protect our coastal wetlands and, in turn, the critical energy infrastructure that is so important to our U.S. economy.

The Louisiana congressional delegation is working to ensure a final compromise is presented to President Bush before the end of the this year. Now, it is up to the leadership in this body and in the Senate to bring the bill to conference and to get a compromise to President Bush. The sooner Congress acts, the sooner southwest Louisiana can protect itself from the devastation we saw from Hurricane Rita 1 year ago.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, the people of southwest Louisiana never asked for a Federal handout, but rather for a helping hand. For many Americans last year's hurricane season will be remembered by the images of chaos and confusion. For those of us who were there to witness the devastation in southwest Louisiana, the recovery of the people whose lives it forever changed, we come away with a much different story, one that gives us hope, one that shows the resiliency of the people of southwest Louisiana.

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The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. DEFAZIO) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. DEFAZIO addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

#### MARKING 15TH ANNIVERSARY OF REESTABLISHMENT OF INDEPENDENCE OF ARMENIA

Mr. SCHIFF. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to speak out of order.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Without objection, the gentleman from California is recognized for 5 minutes.

There was no objection.

Mr. SCHIFF. Mr. Speaker, today marks the 15th anniversary of the reestablishment of the independence of the Republic of Armenia. On behalf of the tens of thousands of Armenia Americans in my district, the largest Armenia community outside of Armenia, "Oorakh Angakhootyan Or," congratulations to the people of Armenia on a decade and a half of freedom.

Building upon the foundations of the first Armenian Republic of 1918, today's Armenia has, in the years since it declared its independence from the disintegrating Soviet Union in 1991, strengthened democracy and the rule of law, promoted free-market reforms, and sought a just and lasting peace in a troubled region.

With America's help, Armenia is overcoming the brutal legacy of Ottoman persecution, Soviet oppression, Azerbaijani aggression against Karabagh, and the ongoing dual blockades by Turkey and its allies in Baku.

Recognizing this progress, John Evans, the former U.S. Ambassador, said in 2004, that "Armenia now has well-founded hopes for a prosperous and democratic future."

I am proud of the role that the United States Congress has played in strengthening the enduring bond between the American and Armenian peoples. This special relationship is rooted in our shared values and experiences over the course of more than a century. Among these shared values are a commitment to democracy, tolerance, religious freedom, human rights and the peaceful resolution of conflicts.

In the 1890s, Clara Barton, the founder of the American Red Cross, traveled to Armenia to help the Armenian victims of massacres being perpetrated by the Ottoman Turkish Government.

In 1915, as the Ottoman Empire began its campaign of genocide against the Armenian people, the U.S. Ambassador to Constantinople, Henry Morgenthau, documented and, at the risk of his own career, protested the ongoing massacres, death marches and other barbarities.

Later, President Woodrow Wilson led the formation of the Near East Relief Foundation to help the survivors of the

Armenian genocide, and spearheaded the international efforts to secure justice for the Armenian people and to support the first Republic of Armenia.

Later, after the short-lived Republic of Armenia was annexed by the Soviet Union, Armenians here in America and around the world were key allies in our decades-long struggle against the Soviet threat to freedom. This cooperation contributed to bringing an end to the Soviet Union, to the rebirth of an independent Armenia, and to the democracy movement and self-determination of Karabagh.

Armenia has made tremendous progress in building up a free-market-oriented economy over the past decade and a half. According to the Heritage Foundation/Wall Street Journal Index of Economic Freedom, Armenia is consistently ranked as a free economy, and is currently the 27th freest in the index's 2006 rankings.

Recognizing this, the United States has named Armenia as one of only a handful of countries to have qualified for assistance through the Millennium Challenge Account, a program which targets development assistance to countries that rule justly, invest in their people and encourage economic freedom.

Armenia has also sought to integrate itself in the world economy as a member of the World Trade Organization, and I was pleased to join many of my colleagues in working to extend the Permanent Normal Trade Relations status to Armenia.

Armenia's economic accomplishments are more extraordinary when you factor in the crippling and illegal economic blockades imposed by Turkey and Azerbaijan. The blockades cost Armenia an estimated \$720 million a year and have forced more than 800,000 Armenians, close to a quarter of Armenia's population, to leave their homeland over the past decade.

The biggest challenge Armenia faces is the hostility of its neighbors. While the primary threat from Turkey is economic and diplomatic, Azerbaijan has been far more bellicose. Both Armenia and Nagorno Karabagh have demonstrated their commitment to a peaceful resolution of the Karabagh conflict through the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. In contrast, Azerbaijan has taken reckless steps that have contributed to instability in a region of strategic and economic importance.

Armenia's Soviet past and the economic and security challenges it faces have impeded the country's progress towards full democracy and the rule of law. Those of us who care deeply about Armenia and the Armenian people must continue to help Armenia to perfect its institutions and expand the rule of law.

Mr. Speaker, nobody knows the need for broad engagement with Armenia more than the Armenian-American community, which has strong ties to its ancestral homeland. Armenian

Americans have made contributions to every aspect of American life. From investor Kirk Kerkorian to Ray Damadian, inventor of Magnetic Resonance Imaging, to the multiplatinum rock band System of a Down, Armenian-Americans have enriched our Nation. They are also committed to contributing to an ever brighter future for Armenia. I have been privileged to work with many of the community on ending this government's tragic failure to recognize the Armenian genocide, on ending the Turkish and Azerbaijani economic blockade, on securing aid to Armenia, and securing permanent normal trade relations with Armenia.

Armenia has come a long way in 15 short years, and I look forward to much more progress in the years ahead.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. BURTON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. BURTON of Indiana addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

#### OUTLAW OF THE UNDERGROUND

Mr. POE. Request permission to take Mr. BURTON's time and speak out of order.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Without objection, the gentleman from Texas is recognized for 5 minutes.

There was no objection.

Mr. POE. Mr. Speaker, it is said that justice is the one thing that you should always find. And hopefully we will find justice soon. Just a few days ago in South Carolina, on an afternoon like every afternoon throughout America, school buses take children home, and this particular school bus dropped off a 14-year-old girl named Elizabeth near her home so she could walk through this rural place where she lived.

Soon after getting off the school bus, though, she came in contact with a local villain. His name is Vincent Filyaw, 37 years old. He started talking to Elizabeth. He kidnapped her. He took her to the woods. He was posing as a police officer. And after he finally walked her around so she could be disoriented about where she was, he took her to a hole in the ground, 15 feet deep, where he kept her for 10 days.

In this hole in the ground, the cover of it was a piece of plywood. Down in this hole he had a camp stove, he had another hole dug for a toilet, he had a shelf and some dirty cooking utensils. It looked like an underground outhouse. I have seen photographs of it.

This was Elizabeth's dark dungeon of depravity for 10 days. He had booby-trapped this hole in the ground so that when he was gone, and if she tried to leave, it would blow up and kill her.

When he was there, he abused her. He abused her as much as he wished. He had weapons. He had homemade grenades to protect himself from the police if they ever found him. It is hard